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August 3, 2004

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I write to express my extreme disappointment that your Administration has agreed to reduce – by 20 percent – the domestic farm programs and income safety net for corn, soybeans, wheat, and other crops, and to urge you to instruct Ambassador Zoellick to rescind this offer.

My concern is that this agreement represents a continuing pattern by your Administration to reduce our nation's farm support and safety net programs that were agreed to as part of the bipartisan 2002 Farm Bill. Your Administration initially opposed increased funding contained in that legislation, a position that Congress overwhelmingly rejected. Furthermore, your Administration has continued to seek further reductions in important Farm Bill investments through your annual budget requests.

The trade agreement reached over the weekend appears to commit the United States to reductions in the farm supports without obtaining any assurance whatsoever that our trading partners will take actions that benefit U.S. producers.

A preliminary analysis indicates that if the terms of this negotiation are finalized, your Administration will have dealt a devastating blow to farm support and safety net provisions necessary to protect producers when prices are extremely low. Based simply on our current farm support commitments, this would cause a reduction of several billion dollars in allowable farm program spending in the first year of the agreement alone. Such a cut would severely weaken the support for farmers – a particularly troubling matter should commodity prices once again decline. In my state of South Dakota, the reductions could amount to tens of millions of dollars each year that are taken away from farmers and the state's economy. Since agriculture is the number one industry in South Dakota, the agreement that Ambassador Zoellick has reached could have a devastating impact on the overall health of the state's economy.

In sum, it appears that your Administration has, yet again, disregarded the needs of rural Americans in an effort to reach a comprehensive trade agreement that, while potentially beneficial to other segments of our economy, could devastate our nation's farmers and the rural communities in which they live.

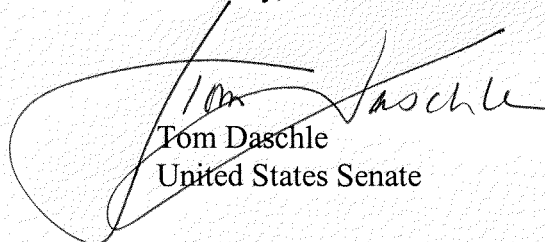
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Mr. President, in times of poor commodity prices, family farmers in South Dakota must rely heavily upon farm programs and the safety net provisions established by Republicans and Democrats alike as part of the 2002 Farm Bill. The ongoing pattern of your Administration to continue to slash funding and trade away important components of our nation's farm laws is deeply disturbing. I believe it represents a pattern of disregard for rural Americans.

I urge you to immediately instruct Ambassador Zoellick to rescind the 20 percent reduction offer and work to ensure that American's farmers and ranchers are treated with the dignity and respect that they deserve as important components of our nation's economy.

I look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Daschle", is written over a large, loopy circular flourish. The signature is positioned above the printed name and title.

Tom Daschle
United States Senate